

Had we lived in Jerusalem around the year 30 AD, we would not have seen a romantic hillside with three crosses on it.

We would have seen a city surrounded by a wall and outside the wall, all around the perimeter, thousands – maybe ten thousand – crosses.

We cannot imagine it, but in the Roman Empire, public crucifixion was commonplace.

Nowadays in America, such justice is carried out more privately, but we are familiar with hangings, firing squads, and thanks to the internet, even beheadings.

In our global world of instant news, such public deaths are frequently before our eyes --

But it is never commonplace when a dear friend is in the picture.

Then, it is dreadful – personal – bitter.

Unfortunately, it is easy to overlook or even ignore the deaths of thousands in other places, at other times.

But it is unbearably impossible to ignore the suffering and death of someone who is beloved and cherished.

It is Even more unbearable when that beloved friend *chooses* to suffer and die

– not for his own escape, not as suicide

– not for his own glory

But for us – for us whose sins have caused this tragedy.

It's been an uncomfortable week, hasn't it? Last Sunday, we were crying out "Crucify! Crucify!" , a truth that is hard to accept about ourselves.

With Peter, we deny knowing our Lord to save our own skin

– and with Judas, we hand Jesus over for our own benefit, treating him as little more than a pawn in a chess game.

And today, we will desert him – we will run away from the sight of his death.

We will push away any associations that link us to him so that we are not held accountable for what has happened.

But what is really terrifying is not the immediate consequences for us – not the loss of face with our friends or the discovery of our part in the events of this day.

What is really terrifying is the realization

that this is where all our attempts to make a name for ourselves lead

This is where all our efforts to save ourselves by our own efforts to be good, righteous, and pure end up – on death row.

and that Jesus, the great I AM, has taken our place in line.

Once – and for all -- Jesus has taken our place.

We think we can save ourselves by avoiding suffering – but Jesus saves us by entering into suffering for our sake.

The evils of Syria, the Holocaust, the World Trade Center,

Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Japan,

Bosnia, abortion clinics, refugee camps, ISIS

corrupt justice systems, misguided governments,
and natural orders run amok

– **all find their end as Jesus said “It is finished.
And bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”**

And more than that, the private evils that lurk in the shadows of our hearts and homes

–the evils that steal our life away moment by moment **have also been slain with Jesus, King of God’s chosen people.**

Yet, this King’s throne is the cross

– by his suffering and death, Jesus redeems us from the eternal consequences of all sin and evil – ours and others’ .

And by his wounds , we are healed of sin-sickness.

By the agony of his suffering and death, Jesus frees us from sin and death.

– as he is nailed to the cross, our shackles fall away;

as his breath is labored, we may breathe freely

Jesus’ death gives us life to live now as those set free forever from death row.

He gives us Life to live as those who see a new way forward in this world

– the way of love that casts out all fear and makes room for all people in the heart of God.

So it is that we in English-speaking lands observe this day as Good Friday – good because of what it accomplished – our salvation and that of the whole world.

Other parts of the world know it as Lament or Sorrow Friday. And really, it is both, isn't it.

We lament what our sins caused for our dear Lord and we rejoice in the good that God made of our mess.

Truly on this day we see how it is true, as St. Paul writes in Romans 8:28:

And we know that for those **who** love God all things work **together** for good, for those **who are called according to his purpose**.

Thank you Jesus, for what you have done for us today.

Amen